



Tackling child poverty: an urgent priority

Poverty is devastating. It means kids going without things they need. Children are arriving at school hungry, unable to concentrate on their lessons. They are returning to cold homes. And they are missing out on everyday experiences and opportunities that make up childhood, like school trips, going to birthday parties and having friends round for tea.

Poverty puts children's education, health and life chances on the line. Household income is the strongest predictor of how well a child will do in school. Poverty affects child health even before birth. Children in poverty are more likely to have asthma and other childhood diseases. They are more likely to have poor mental health. These effects last into adulthood.

More than four million children are living in poverty in the UK. That's nine kids in an average classroom of 30.

This isn't right, and it doesn't have to be like this. Child poverty responds to policy decisions, and the solutions are within our grasp. With political leadership and determination, we can make the crucial difference for this generation of children as well as the next – making their daily lives better and their future lives brighter.

Lifting one million children out of poverty

Child poverty has risen as support for children has been cut. Child benefit alone has lost 20 per cent of its value since 2010.

A comprehensive strategy for tackling child poverty looks at decent homes and jobs, inclusive education and childcare, services for children and families such as health and advice, and most crucially reform to our social security system. A child poverty strategy would prioritise policies that directly affect children living in poverty by putting more money into families' pockets, and ease pressures faced by families by, for example, helping to increase earnings and reducing school costs.

These four steps would immediately lift a million children out of poverty:

- 1. Scrapping the two-child limit**, which restricts support to two children in a family. This is the single most cost-effective way to reduce child poverty. Almost 1.8 million children are affected by the policy, the vast majority of whom live in poverty. Scrapping the two-child limit would lift 300,000 children out of poverty and mean 800,000 children are in less deep poverty, at a cost of £1.8 billion.
- 2. Scrapping the benefit cap**, which limits the support a family can receive if they are not working or working a small amount. Removing the benefit cap would substantially reduce the depth of poverty for the 300,000 children living in families affected by the cap, and cost just £300 million.
- 3. Making free school meals available to all pupils.** Free school meals relieve pressures on household budgets, free up money for other living costs, and remove the stress of making and managing school meals. Current eligibility is far too stringent. CPAG's analysis shows that 900,000 children in poverty in England do not currently qualify for free school meals. CPAG estimates that rolling out universal FSM in England would cost £2 billion.
- 4. Increasing child benefit by £20 a week** for all children. Increasing child benefit would further reduce child poverty while also supporting the income security of low- and middle-income families who sit just above the threshold for means-tested benefits but still struggle financially. Increasing child benefit by £20 a week would pull 600,000 children out of poverty, at a cost of £12 billion.

